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ANNOUNCES BIODIVERSITY DAYS 2003: MAY 31 – JUNE 8

"The Year of the BioBlitz" – an opportunity to explore nature in your own backyard

Secretary of Environmental Affairs Ellen Roy Herzfelder today announced the schedule for Biodiversity Days 2003, the celebration of nature's diversity that is presented each year by the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs and regional environmentalists.

"Biodiversity Days has become a tradition in which the citizens of the Commonwealth take stock of and appreciate the diversity of the natural world here at home," said Secretary Roy Herzfelder. "In a region subject to the increasing pressure of development, it is essential that we strike a sensible balance between the quest for growth and economic vitality, and the need to preserve and protect our roots – nature's biodiversity."

Species walks will take place in dozens of cities and towns in the coming weeks, with an intensive series of "BioBlitzes" scheduled during the 10-day period from Friday, May 30 through Sunday, June 8. Equal part outdoor festival, competition, species inventory and outdoor classroom, each of the more than 15 BioBlitzes will offer citizens young and old opportunities to explore some of the more than 100 natural communities found across the Commonwealth.

"One of the Romney administration's top priorities is to replace unplanned development with smart growth strategies," said Secretary Roy Herzfelder. "Only by considering the bigger picture – both in terms of geography and in terms of ecology – can we become more certain that we're leaving Massachusetts a better place for future generations."

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BioBlitzes are being scheduled throughout the state. They include a May 31 event at the Blue Hills Reservation south of Boston, one on June 1 at Mass. Audubon's Joppa Flats Education Center at Plum Island, Newburyport, and others on June 7 at Barton Cove in the Connecticut River, near Northfield Mountain, and on June 8 in Franklin Park, in the heart of Boston. The full schedule of BioBlitzes, as well as dozens of nature walks that regional organizers have planned during the next two months, are listed on EOE's Web site, at www.biodiversitydays.net.

Secretary Roy Herzfelder also released the results of Biodiversity Days 2002, which took place last year from May 31 to June 3. Between 30,000 and 40,000 participants sighted 2,200 species during more than 800 nature walks, the most walks since the event began. Walks took place in more than 280 towns, also a record. About 140 communities participated in 2000, and 230 in 2001.

This year, Secretary Roy Herzfelder and EOE, the nine regional organizers, hundreds of local volunteer coordinators and trip leaders, and more than a half dozen co-sponsors are working together to host outdoor explorations and educational programs. This will enable tens of thousands of young people, families, elders, amateur naturalists and those who just want to satisfy their curiosity to become better acquainted with the world of nature – the biodiversity – to be found right outside the nearest doorway. Participants will learn more about the remarkable number and types of species to be discovered in the 105 natural communities that have been identified by the Massachusetts Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program, which is part of the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, an agency within EOE.

In 2000, Massachusetts became the first state in the nation to sponsor a broad-scale, citizen-directed species inventory. And it continues to be the only state to draw upon citizen-generated data to build a database that tracks species and their habitats. EOE's Web site www.biodiversitydays.net – is designed to channel that information directly to land use decision-makers and conservationists, as well as to the general public.

This year, the species inventories compiled during the BioBlitzes and two months of nature walks will continue to advance the Commonwealth's objective of constructing a useful, permanent and accessible species database. The twin goals of this effort are to energize tens of thousands of citizen naturalists to discover and learn about the component species of our biodiversity, and to gather data on the location and distribution of thousands of the more common native species.

This year's regional organizers are as follows: the Athol Bird & Nature Club, the Massachusetts Audubon Society's Broad Meadow Brook Conservation Center and Wildlife Sanctuary and its South Shore sanctuaries, the Connecticut River Watershed Council, Incredible Animals, the Nashua River Watershed Association, the Neponset River Watershed Association, the Parker River Clean Water Association and Salem Sound Coastwatch.

Biodiversity Days 2003 sponsors include the Gerry E. Studds/Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary, Harvard Museum of Natural History, Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences, Massachusetts Audubon Society, Massachusetts Watershed Coalition, Natural New England, The Nature Conservancy of Massachusetts, New England Aquarium, New England Wildflower Society, South Shore Natural Science Center and The Trustees of Reservations.

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